

THE PULPIT.

A SCHOLARLY SUNDAY SERMON BY
REV. LYNN HAROLD HOUGH.

Theme: The Theologian's Task.

Brooklyn, N. Y.—In the Summerfield M. E. Church Sunday morning the pastor, the Rev. Lynn Harold Hough, preached on "The Theologian's Task." The text was from II. Corinthians 10:5: "Bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." Mr. Hough said:

The theologian has a multitude of tasks. His world has room for many a Hercules. In its vast fields there is a summons to infinite toil and there is opportunity for high and varied achievement. In his hand the theologian holds a book which he is to master and to interpret. This is no simple achievement. The work enlarges and divides itself until this book becomes the creator of vocations.

Sometimes the theologian is a student of detail. With the microscope of his scholarship he applies himself to the mastery of the words weaving across the pages of the book. Nothing about their life or history is too small to claim his attention. For this work he needs large resources. In the Old Testament field, all the Semitic languages have aid to give him. In the New all Greek literature may be laid under tribute. A grammarian with eye alert for the slightest shades of meaning, he toils with patience through the years. He builds libraries and grows gray—whole generations of him have grown gray—in accomplishing this task.

Sometimes the theologian is a student of the problem of authorship, weighing the evidence of use of words, of point of view, and the historical background pre-supposed in particular portions of the Scriptures, and so rescuing buried documents from the Hexateuch or discovering the unknown prophet of the Exile.

Sometimes he is a Biblical theologian in the more formal sense, studying the theological outlook of different periods, and scientifically setting forth the teaching of the various authors of the book. At his summons the prophets once more walk before us: Amos, with his passion for righteousness; Hosea, the prophet of the suffering love of God; Isaiah, stalwart statesman prophet in the nation's crisis; Jeremiah, against whose bent bare life the awful blasts beat in fury, and the sunrise prophet of the Exile, with face aglow with light and heart athrob with his great message of vicarious suffering; these, with all the other figures of that wonderful Old Testament life, and out of it all God with His high righteousness and tender love, engaged for generations in the training of a people—a great, divinely guided history pointing more and more clearly forward to a Coming One, who is to be at once its explanation and its goal. The ideas of the various men who spoke to the nation, the outlook of different periods, and the way of looking at life and the things of God which in a general way characterizes the whole Old Testament time, the Biblical theologian makes clear to us.

Then at last the New Testament life—the majestic figure of the Spotted One, with the winsomeness of brother humanity, and the awesomeness of the divine—the great Redemption Deed, before which we hide our faces—a deed in which infinite love, infinite hope speak forever to the world. Following Christ, the men with lives struck into flame from His words and work as redemptive begin their conquests in history. Then, ere we close the pages of the book, a glimpse of the "light never seen on sea or land," from Jerusalem the golden. From all this pageant of great figures and great deeds, with its one supreme figure and one supreme deed, the meaning is extracted so that the teaching about life which comes from Jesus and which is given by the various New Testament authors, is set systematically before us, and at last continued in such fashion that we come to see and appreciate the New Testament point of view.

Sometimes the theologian is a historian tracing the life of the church through the burden-laden years, or the movement of its thought as it has ceaselessly grappled with the problems of the faith. The ages become articulate through his toil and the past comes before us, flung warm from his pen.

There are great and necessary tasks, and master minds have been devoted to them. There are great tasks and stepping stones to a higher—the supreme task of all.

There comes one great demand to the theologian. When the wonder of the book shines out and the power of its teachings is felt—as the past becomes real—then the present stands waiting. This past must be poured into the life of to-day. The book—the Christ of the book—the faith of the life.

A theologian is not to be a man of letters, instantly in some men's thought. Every thought to obedience to the Christ is the key to the kingdom. And to show the presence of God in the Christian's life.

Accepting this reason solves for questions in the life of it.

to a Christian, organic view of life, the essentials of Christianity, this is the superb work to which the theologian is called.

We need to face the fact that the world cannot permanently accept a religion which is smaller than life. To refuse like the distinguished German theologian, Albrecht Ritschl, to relate Christian truth to scientific truth, is to sign the death warrant of the faith.

Does it seem an ambitious thing to demand a Christ dominated and a cross-dominated universe? Anything less means that when the fog has lifted from men's thoughts there will be a Christless universe and a hopeless universe. To take a metaphysically divine Christ, an atoning death, an actual resurrection, a tri-

ity of rich and perfect personal God life, an actual salvation from actual sin; a new life for men, a great ultimate goal in Christ, and with these to unlock every door in this universe—this is the supreme task of the theologian.

What is to be his relation to men? He is to be a student of all life and of all literature. He listens—oh, so eagerly!—to every voice of humanity. He studies intently its deeds in order to understand what they all mean. Thus he discovers that the very structure of life, as it is, demands what Christianity offers, and that without it, life is a hopeless enigma. His great apologetic is that the closer you get to the centre of human life, the closer you get to the need of Christ. The real life and literature comes at last to one great yearning—sometimes an unconscious yearning, but a yearning still—for Christ.

What is the theologian's relation to Christian experience? This is the central fact of his life and thought. The faith has brought to him and to others salvation, and in the radiant light of that fact he interprets it. To express in all its relations the philosophy of the total Christian experience of the church, is a brief way of defining systematic theology. This inner life of the church is a power in deciding the great problems of theology, and a necessary guide in the interpretation of the Bible. The theologian ever studies Christian consciousness that he may adequately express it.

What is his relation to the Bible? It has a vital, but not a mechanical authority. The Bible is not his home. It vindicates its authority as God's Word, as God's unique revelation, because it, and it alone, brings the message which gives complete peace and leads humanity to its goal. The theologian must be true to the whole Biblical message about Redemption. He must be true to it because it requires all of it to meet fully the needs of men. Reverent criticism has no terrors for him. He gladly accepts its justified results, but builds his own work far below all criticism on the rock of certainty, the met need of the race, which criticism cannot touch. Tentative criticism may seem to put to doubt some fundamental. The ultimate criticism will confirm them all.

What is the theologian's relation to philosophy? He accepts the philosophical system which seems most perfectly to explain the data of existence. But he demands that his philosophy shall be as large as all life—all the Christian facts, as well as all the other facts of life. His passion for reality saves him from a one-sided adherence to any philosophical system at the expense of truth.

What is his relation to science? As a classification he accepts and uses it. When it presumes to call a classification an explanation, when it insists that what is merely a description of the method in which God works is a self-sustaining process, he parts company with it. He knows that science can classify, but cannot explain. Explanation is the task of philosophy and theology.

Now can we get a conception of the greatness of the systematic theologian's work? Christian experience, the Bible, human life, the best philosophy he can attain—these he relates, combines and fuses, and constructs a living world-view. "He sees life steadily and sees it whole." Phillips Brooks defined preaching as giving truth through personality. The interpreter of Christianity is to give theology through personality. All of it is to be passed through his own life—life of head, heart and will, and is to come forth as a personal message to the world.

Thus it is to be set on fire, and so blazing and shining with power it will secure the attention and eager interest of men.

The theology of the graveyard has no message to any age. A dynamic, living theology has a message for every age. Our own age is busy and brilliant, but it is doubting, suffering and sinning for all that. And when the theologian speaks in a voice ringing with reality, it will listen to him, and will be guided to the Christ, who alone can give it peace.

A Word Fittingly Spoken.

A lady once writing to a young man in the navy who was almost a stranger, thought: "Shall I close this as anybody would? Or shall I say a word for my Master?" And lifting up her heart for a moment she wrote telling him that his constant change of scene and place was an apt illustration of the words, "Here have we no continuing city," and asked whether he could say: "I seek one to come." Tremblingly she folded it and sent it off.

Back came the answer: "Thank you so much for those kind words. I am an orphan, and no one has spoken to me like that since my mother died long years ago." The word, like an arrow shot at venture, reached its mark, and the young man shortly after rejoined in the fullness of Gospel peace.—Pittsburg Christian Advocate.

Why We Do Not Pray Better.

One reason we do not pray better, I suppose, is that we are afraid of being answered. It is a very serious thing to pray, because we may be taken at our word. We must consent that God should order the answer.

For instance: I pray in the morning that God will make me very useful to-day; it is a hazardous prayer; I may be taken at my word. Within an hour I may be called to a very great usefulness, that will take a hundred dollars from my bank account. Now, if I don't want to take that money if it is called for, I have made a mistake in my prayer. Let us say what we mean.—Alexander McKenzie.

Silent Victories.

Our boldness for God before the world must always be the result of individual dealing with God, in secret. Our victories over sin, and self, and the world, are always first fought where no eye sees but God's.—Whitfield.

Show Them the Door.

There are some sorrows which, because they are lingering guests, I will entertain but moderately, knowing that the more they are made of the longer they will stay.—Bishop Hall.

The Sunday-School

INTERNATIONAL LESSON COMMENTS FOR JUNE 20.

Subject: The Parable of the Tares, Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43—Commit Verses 37, 38.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Matt. 13:43.

TIME.—Autumn, A. D. 28.

PLACE.—By the Sea of Galilee, near Capernaum.

EXPOSITION.—I. Two Sowers, 24, 25. Here, as in the preceding lesson, Jesus appears as a sower of good seed; but in the preceding parable "the seed is the Word of God;" in this parable "the good seed are the sons of the kingdom" (v. 38). But the sons of the kingdom are themselves the product of the Word of God (Jas. 1:18; I Pet. 1:23); so that there is a close connection between the two parables and the two sowings. It is by sowing "the Word of God" that the Son of man sows "sons of the kingdom." There are in this world "sons of the kingdom" only because Jesus has sown them. The world is "His field," He has purchased it by His blood; the devil has forfeited it by his unfaithfulness. But the devil does not like to relinquish the world of which he was once the prince (Jno. 12:31). But the world belongs to Christ, "the sons of the evil one" are sown in it, but they don't belong in it, and when the harvest comes they will be gathered out and sent to their own place. There is deep significance in two words in verse 25, "His enemy." The devil is our enemy, but he is primarily Christ's enemy. There is no one whom he hates as he hates the Son of God. Christ receives what the devil aspired to, the worship of the universe (Heb. 1:6; Rev. 5:11-13; comp. Matt. 4:9; Ez. 28:16, 17). The devil seeks to caricature and thwart Christ's work at every step. Christ sows good seed in His field, the devil comes by stealth and sows tares. The parable brings out very clearly the personality of the devil, the certainty of his existence, the malignity of his heart, the activity of his movements, the cunning of his operations, the subtlety of his methods. If there is not a personal devil, the enemy of Christ, this parable is meaningless. There is absolutely no necessity in the drapery of the parable to bring him in. He is in the parable because he exists in fact. The tares in the world are his work. Christ sows "sons of the kingdom" by sowing good seed, "the Word of God;" the devil sows "sons of the evil one" by sowing bad seed, doubts and questions and error (Gen. 3:1, 4; 2 Thess. 2:9, 10). The devil did his work "while men slept." He always acts under cover and while men are off guard. He does much of his work to-day while Christians and ministers are dozing. He brings in the subtleties of disguised infidelity ("higher criticism," etc.) and masked pantheism while we are nodding, and some day we wake up to find the "tares" springing up everywhere among the wheat. When the devil had done his work he "went away." He got out of sight. He always does. He even stirs up some to argue that "there isn't any devil anyway."

II. Two Crops Growing Together, 26-29. There are just two classes of men, "Sons of the kingdom" or "children of God," and "sons of the evil one" (v. 38, R. V.), or "children of the devil" (Jno. 3:10). The two classes are not always distinguishable or separable at the outset (vs. 29, 30), but they will be distinguished and separated when they are ripe, the one for heaven and the other for hell. But it will, fortunately, be the angels and not men who do the separating (v. 41). History furnishes countless instances of the devil's sowing tares among Christ's wheat (e. g., Jno. 13:2; Acts 5:3; 20:29). Both history and the Word of God warn us against deciding that all that appears "among the wheat" must itself be wheat. While the tares were not distinguishable from the wheat until they began to grow, they were tares from the very first. There were those who wished to root up the tares at once, but the time was not ripe, nor were they competent to do the task. There are those who in haste long to extirpate "the sons of the evil one" at once from the world, but the Master says, "let them both grow together until the harvest." Premature separation, by religious persecution, would mean injury to wheat as well as destruction to tares. This history has abundantly proven. This parable does not forbid church discipline. "The field is"—not the church, but "the world" (v. 38). Church discipline is positively commanded in the Bible (I Cor. 5:3-5; 11: Rom. 16:17; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14). In the delay in separating the chaff from the wheat we have another illustration of God's long-suffering (cf. 2 Pat. 3:9).

III. Two Harvests, 30, 35, 36-41. Separation comes at last. It is "in the end of the age" (v. 39, R. V. Marg.). "The reapers are the angels." They are to be the ministers of God's boundless grace towards "the sons of the kingdom" and the executioners of His wrath towards "the sons of the evil one." The tares are to be "gathered" and the wheat is to be "gathered;" but the one for burning in "the furnace of fire," where there is inconceivable grief and impotent rage (v. 42), the other into God's storehouse, "the kingdom of their Father," where "they shall shine forth as the sun." Is the fire literal? It is in the interpretation of the parable as well as in the parable itself. Evil is not to gradually disappear from the world, but to grow side by side with the wheat "until the harvest."

More Than Knowledge.

Good nature is worth more than knowledge, more than money, to the persons who possess it, and certainly, to everybody who dwells with them, in so far as mere happiness is concerned.—Henry Ward Beecher.

News Notes.

German paper-makers are experimenting with various fiber plants in the hope of finding a material sufficiently cheap for use in supplying the constantly increasing demand. Sisal hemp, wild grasses, palm-leaves, Spanish broom, banana fiber and cotton-bolls are among the substances tested. The United States government is engaged in similar experiments. If some substitute for wood pulp can be found the forests will be allowed to stand a little longer.

Germany has long been pointed to by the advocates of beer-drinking as a country where almost everybody drinks light beer without evil effects. But now Emperor William has issued a solemn warning on the subject to the young men of his empire. He tells them that the drink habit is seriously injuring the individual young men and the nation as a whole, with the result that both are falling behind foreigners, especially Americans and the English, who have more sensible ideas regarding drink by youths. Nobody has ever accused the Emperor of being a temperance "crank," and he views the matter wholly in the light of effectiveness in the battle of life.

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Agricultural News Notes.

On account of the diminishing supply of Pacific red salmon, there is now an increase in the demand for pink salmon.

The patrons of Husbandry, also known as the Grange, is the largest and most effective secret organization of farmers in the world.

The production of sugar at the China beet-sugar factory in San Bernardino County, California, amounted to 22,237,000 pounds.

There is an alligator-farm near Sarasota, not far from Tampa, Florida. There is a brisk demand by tourists for the small "gators," also for the hides of the large ones.

Unquestionably the lack of a parcels post system, similar to that of Great Britain, is a hindrance to rural progress in this country. The farmers want it and will now get it.

No more serious danger to the vital agricultural interests of the nation now exists than the consolidation of interests which seek to get possession of the water-power on the various rivers.

Texas is acquiring a national reputation as a turkey-growing state. Dallas is said to be the largest shipping-point. The refrigerating system, by which dressed turkeys can now be placed on distant markets irrespective of weather conditions, is promoting the rapid growth of this industry.

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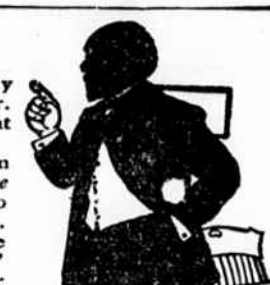
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